

**Kerry Leichtman  
80 Mt. Pleasant Street  
Rockport, Maine 04856**

January 5, 2022

Rockport Planning Board  
c/o Orion Thomas  
Town of Rockport  
Rockport, Maine 04856

To the members of Rockport's Planning Board,

In August 2012 a Site Plan application was submitted to the Rockport Planning Board for change of use and renovations to the building located at 24 Central Street (Union Hall) in downtown Rockport. At that time, I was the chair of the Planning Board and led the review of the application.

As part of this application no additional on-site or off-site parking was proposed. The lot on which the 24 Central Street building was located did not have any land available to meet the Land Use Ordinance parking requirements and thus it was determined that a waiver of all parking requirements under the Land Use Ordinance would be, in my own words, "the smartest thing to do." I made a motion to waive all Land Use Ordinance onsite and offsite parking requirements for the 24 Central Street Site Plan application. It was approved unanimously.

During this meeting there was a significant discussion of the impact on town public parking and private parking located behind 18 Central (Shepherd Block) due to 24 Central Street having no parking. It was determined (through a parking study) that there was adequate nearby public parking to support the proposed building uses.

From the August 8, 2012 Planning Board Minutes:

*Union Hall: site plan review for a change of use in Union Hall (educational to commercial – restaurant, retail grocery) on a parcel identified as Map 29, Lot 297 and located at 24 Central St. in District 913 (continued from the 6/20/12 and 7/11/12 meetings):*

*In reviewing Section 800, Chair Leichtman said the only issue was parking regulations. He did not feel grand-fathering would be applicable, due to the change of use, and suggested that waiving the parking regulations would be the smartest thing to do. He said the developers would have to work on the fact that there was parking, but not parking awareness. Mr. Ostheimer asked if the parking would be compromised when there was activity at the Opera House. Mr. Leichtman responded that the town and police were notified of special events. Ms. McKenzie said that development of the parking area and sidewalks would help people take advantage of what was there. Mr. Murphy assumed signs would designate who could use which parking spaces, but Mr. Sabatini said he would prefer to keep it open, simply providing signs that designated it as public parking.*

**ACTION:** Kerry Leichtman made a motion, seconded by Thomas Murphy, to waive the parking space regulations for this project.  
Carried 5-0-0

Waiving parking requirements when reviewing plans to locate a business in the downtown area was routine for the planning board during my eleven-year tenure as its chairman. The ordinance permitted us to waive or amend parking requirements and we did it often when reviewing applications for downtown, always unanimously. From the ordinance: "The Planning Board may, at its sole discretion, increase or decrease the above parking requirements depending upon individual applicant circumstances."

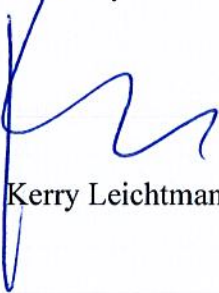
We did this for two reasons: we wanted the town center to be active rather than a ghost town, and the parking study had proved adequate parking existed within very reasonable walking distances from the center of town.

We made the analogy more than once that it was unreasonable to require and unrealistic to expect that parking be available on premises or at curbside directly adjacent to a person's destination, that when visiting Camden, Rockland, Portland, Portsmouth, Boston, New York City, a person may hope for but does not expect to find a parking space in the immediate vicinity of their destination. Rockport is no different. I was of the belief that sidewalks, lighting and signage directing people to parking would alleviate much of the problem. This is what I meant when I said parking awareness was lacking.

What we were doing made sense to me 10 years ago and is borne out by the changes taking place now in urban planning where the trend is to eliminate parking requirements, not make them more restrictive. The Town of Camden recently eliminated parking requirements for downtown businesses because the requirement was unnecessarily stifling business growth. It is assumed patrons to one downtown business will also patronize other downtown businesses. For example, a person staying in Rockport's hotel will visit one of the restaurants, maybe shop at Peter Ralston's gallery and take in a show at the Opera House. It is not reasonable to require all of these establishments to each have a parking space for that individual.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kerry Leichtman